

*Federal Transfers to Provinces*

with those of the parliamentary task force on federal-provincial arrangements is completely false. The federal government has followed through with some recommendations of the task force, but they are not central to the over-all political and social impact of this particular proposal. For example, the task force recommended that municipal property taxes be included in the equalization scheme. That has been done. The task force recommended that there be an equal per capita entitlement in EPF. That has been done. These are some of the recommendations of the task force which have been adopted, but recommendations such as the one with regard to the revenue guarantee being money used for anything other than health care and post-secondary education have been ignored by the government and there is absolutely no way to read the report otherwise.

With respect to equalization itself, the proposal of the government for the five-province standard has only been in existence for about a month. I believe it was first proposed to the provinces at the first ministers' conference in February. We are expected to pass this particular proposal by the end of the month, however. The provinces have not had a decent chance to look at it nor have we in this House had a decent chance to look at it. The number crunching will go on for weeks in an attempt to figure out who is losing and who is gaining from this new equalization scheme proposed in the bill. It is very complicated, Mr. Speaker. The complication of the census figures, the relationship between the EPF equalized tax points, the budget tax changes, what the provinces will collect as a result of those changes and what they will receive in cash, is difficult to understand. I do not believe that the government has provided enough time for Members of Parliament, let alone the public, to understand what is going on. That is why I deeply regret that the government decided to bring these measures forward in a package.

● (1730)

The hon. member for Mississauga South referred to a question that I put to the Minister of National Health and Welfare last month. I asked whether she would consider graduating the withholding of funds when provinces do not meet certain national standards. Of course, the question presupposes that the minister would get around to defining what she or the government means by national standards. The medicare crisis has been with us since 1979—some people say since the fall of 1978; actually it has been with us since the last fiscal arrangements were negotiated. Since then we have had the Hall report and the report of the task force, but there has been no action on national standards. There have only been vague promises of meetings with health ministers in the future.

This proposal makes it less likely that when the Minister of National Health and Welfare meets with her counterparts to negotiate national health care standards, she will be able to obtain a ban on extra billing or whatever she has in mind. We are never quite sure what that is. The government cannot, on the other hand, ask the provinces to accept tougher and therefore more expensive health care standards while, on the other hand, taking money from them or while acting unilaterally on equalization at the same time that the Prime Minister

(Mr. Trudeau) is saying that co-operative federalism is dead. The minister cannot expect to act in a complete political vacuum. What she wants to accomplish can only be done with the co-operation of the provinces. The actions of her colleagues make it impossible for her to meet her goals. That is the terrible irony of the situation, Mr. Speaker. If she is as serious about health care in this country as she sounds, then it is about time she began to stand up to the Minister of Finance about the cutbacks in health care and post-secondary education and to the Prime Minister who goes around the country bad mouthing co-operative federalism. Until they are put in their place, what she says she has in mind is not likely to come about.

So far, I have tended to concentrate on the medicare question, but I should now like to turn to the question of post-secondary education, Mr. Speaker. Over the course of the last few weeks thousands and thousands of students have tried to bring their concerns to the attention of politicians. They are rightly concerned that the cutbacks that begin at this level will filter down and mean higher tuition fees, fewer books in the libraries and a reduced quality of education. There is not just the question of the effect of the cutbacks; there is also the question of motive, which is suspect on two grounds. First, there is the general suspicion that we ought to have of any government which, when it is faced with a deficit, declares that it must go after health care and education to alleviate the situation. I think this is an indication that its priorities are all fouled up. I hope to get back to that matter, Mr. Speaker.

The second suspicion concerns the approach that the federal government seems to be taking to post-secondary education. All the hints and approaches that we see seem to suggest that it wants to turn our universities and community colleges into instruments of the national economy—that it wants to reduce education to an economic instrument. It is angry at the universities because they are not turning out the kind of people it wants. It would like to have greater leverage in the post-secondary education community, and so it proposes to cut back the money for them and use it somewhere else in a more manipulative fashion in order to bring the university community into line. This is a serious situation, Mr. Speaker. We find ourselves with a government that wants to redefine post-secondary education and make it instrumental to its own larger economic goals.

I am not saying that people should not have good advice and be trained for the jobs that actually exist. On this side we are very well aware of the difficulties of planning for training to meet the economic needs of the future. We would like to see some work done on that question. I am worried about some of the rhetoric that I hear from cabinet ministers, however, and the rhetoric that I see in the various documents issued by the government which seem to indicate that it wants the post-secondary education system to wither or become something that is only instrumental to what the government perceives as the needs of the economy.